DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 023 PS 025 664

AUTHOR	Ogletree, Earl J.
TITLE	Eurythmy in the Waldorf Schools.
PUB DATE	97
NOTE	11p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Class Activities; Dance Education; Dance Therapy; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Curriculum; Learning Activities; *Movement Education; Music Activities; Private Schools; Psychomotor Objectives; Psychomotor Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Eurythmics; *Waldorf Schools

ABSTRACT

Eurythmy is a disciplined art of movement of the arms and body that visibly expresses the vowels and consonants of speech and the tones and intervals of musical melody. In the classroom, eurythmic movements have a therapeutic function in which the child's development is supported and enhanced through its various stages. This article discusses the application of eurythmy in the Waldorf Schools curriculum, where eurythmy is used to enhance speech, writing, music, mathematics, literature, history, and creativity instruction. The development of eurythmy by Rudolf Steiner as a form of expressive movement is described, and the movements and function of eurythmy are defined as the visible equivalent of the musical phrase or the spoken word. The basis of eurythmy is discussed, as is the nature of eurythmy movements. The paper also discusses the developmental approach to eurythmic application, and its use at grade levels from first through sixth grades, including the nature of instruction and the subject matter enhanced by the movements. Contains 32 references. (JPB)

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ED 410 023

Eurythmy in the Waldorf Schools

Earl J. Ogletree

Eurythmy, an art of movement that expresses and makes visible the sounds of speech the tone and intervals of music, was created by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), in 1912.

Eurythmy differs from other arts of movement, such as ballet. modern dance, and mime, which are confined generally to music or gesture interpretation. Instead eurythmy is a disciplined art of movement of the arms and body that visibly expresses the vowels and consonants of speech and the tones and intervals of musical melody (Donath, 1937). It is not meant to be pantomime or mimic, not illustrative or interpretive gesture, but the visible equivalent movement of the musical phrase or the spoken word. The eurythmic gesture in speech emulates the definite forms we produce in the air when we speak a word. Steiner explains that "the structure of language as such and the character of the separate sounds are brought to visible form in eurythmy. The air-gestures which may be said to be present in language are imitated and made externally visible" (Steiner 1955. p. 15). Steiner (1971b) explained the way in which he arrived at the eurythmic gestures:

> They are not concerned with pantomimic gestures or dance movements, but with actual visible speech or visible song. When speaking and singing, the stream of air is formed in a certain way by the human organ of speech. If we study the formation of tone, vowels, consonants, sentence structure, syllabification, etc., we can form definite mental images of the corresponding manifestations of speech and song (p. 10).

Steiner adapted, transformed, and extended these speech formations (images) made by the speech organs to movements of the whole body, particularly the arms and hands. One could say that eurythmic movements are based on the creative and formational power of speech. Each vowel and consonant of speech and each tone and interval of music has its own natural extension and visible expression through gesture. It is with the hands and arms that man naturally expresses both his feelings and his meaning; and indeed in most parts of the world gesture is a natural accompaniment to speech.

There are three types of eurythmy--speech, music. and curative or therapeutic. Speech and music (tone) eurythmy are also called artistic eurythmy. Therapeutic eurythmy, which is based on artistic eurythmy, requires the assistance of a physician to diagnose the malady, and, with the eurythmist, recommends specific eurythmic movements. Artistic eurythmy is performed by a group or an individual to music, poetry, or drama

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in a class or on the stage. However, it is also used therapeutically to improve speech, posture, coordination, breathing. nervous and personality disorders, and the general health of children and adults.

Eurythmy is an integral part of the Waldorf school's curriculum. Here the eurythmist, with the advice and counsel of the class teacher and the school physician, when needed, determines the necessary movements for each child and class. In reality, all forms of eurythmy are therapeutic, but there are specific eurythmic exercises for each age level. The following sections examine some specific gestures and discuss the application of eurythmy in the Waldorf Schools.

Basis of Eurythmy

In eurythmy the formative laws underlying speech and music are carried over into the larger expressive movements of the arms and body. For example, in the pronunciation of consonant and vowel sounds there is "a distinctly different type of activity of the entire vocal organism in each sound" (Wallace, 1971, p. 38). Thus when we pronounce a "k" as in "king" or "cut", a "L" as in "life" or "lily," a "b" as in "bud" or "baby." There is not only the difference between these sounds, but each has its own innate character and formative power. The "k" as a firm, cutting, and piercing character, (Figure 1); the "L" has a lifting, fluid, and flowing character, (Figure 2); whereas the "b" has a formative, enveloping, and building character, (Figure 3). The "r" for example, has a revolving, rolling, running, rushing character, (Figure 4). One can feel that the consonants relate to the outer world, an external expression of man. It is these characteristic expressions that the eurythmist emphasizes in his/her movements.

Each of the eurythmic consonant movements has a different therapeutic affect. Glas, a physician (1971), stated that the "k" exercise increases and stimulates the rhythms of the digestive system. The "L" exercise stimulates sluggish circulation, which affects the digestive system and improves the breathing. "The firmness of the 'b' reacts strongly on over-active or uncontrolled secretions" e.g., bed-wetting of children" (Wallace, 1971, p.40). The "r" exercise is for stimulation of the sluggish lower digestive tract (Glas, 1971). Each of these movements, when used in curative eurythmy, needs to be performed not only with accuracy but with intensity. Wallace (1971) explained:

> Curative Eurythmy... gestures... are intensified. repeated and modified in such a way that instead of being creative in outer artistic expression, they react strongly back into the bodily organism itself, stimulating the up-building. recreative forces in a more specific way than has hitherto been possible through more general physical exercise. (p.39)

One may ask how can eurythmy influence one's health? Undergirding eurythmy is the formative forces briefly discussed in "Rudolf Steiner and the Waldorf Schools." Steiner stated that the basis of eurythmy is the etheric body or forces. He explained:

> The etheric body contains within it the forces of nourishment and of memory. All this is imparted to airy formations when we speak. The inner being of man, in so far as this is expressed in the etheric body, is impressed into air when we speak...The spoken words are always a birth of the etheric (forces). (Steiner, 1955, pp. 13 & 27)

Eurythmy movements

It is difficult to represent eurythmic gestures through static drawings because they are dynamic movements. The gestures for each consonant and vowel are done with the arms at various positions in relation to the body—for example, above the head, at chest level, towards the feet, and even behind the back. Each position has a significant meaning and effect.

Therapeutic applications of eurythmy

Therapeutic eurythmy is also concerned with supporting and enhancing the child's total development through the various stages of development. To accomplish this the curriculum is adjusted to the developmental stages "to bring harmony to the child and his own body so that he develops his best faculties" (Harwood, 1958, p 147). The exercises are prescribed to integrate what Steiner (1965) calls the threefold nature of man--thinking, feeling and willing.

Along with the artistic approach to education in the Waldorf schools, eurythmy helps keep the child youthful and malleable, therefore open to the more subtle influences of the educational process. Therapeutic eurythmy is an essential part of the Waldorf curriculum from the primary through adolescent years. It is used at all levels to help the physical body become a more amenable instrument for the developing personality and intellect. Wallace (1971) explained its benefits for the adolescent:

> ...toward a variety of problems ranges from correction of posture and prorated ankles to disturbance of the metabolic respiratory and nervous systems, from difficulties of a psychological and temperamental character to serious illness. (p.40)

It can be seen that the line between the therapeutic and academic applications of eurythmy is a fine one, but both are beneficial to the development of the child.

Academic application of Eurythmy

The approach to eurythmy and the way it is taught is determined by the age and development of the child and his grade level. Academically, eurythmy is used to enhance the areas of speech, reading, writing, arithmetic, poetry, music, geometry, drama, language, literature and history. Since a comprehensive description of eurythmy's application in the Waldorf school is beyond the limited scope of this article, I will briefly indicate how it is employed at each grade level.

In the first grade the children are led from natural play to formed movement. It is through the marking of rhythm in poetry and music, through the imitation of eurythmic movements that the children become more acquainted with their own bodies in a natural manner. "The children listen to the sounds and carry out the movements that belong to them" (Heydebrand. 1966. p. 19). These exercises help to enliven the faculties of listening and speaking. Eurythmy also facilitates the readiness stages of learning the alphabet and learning to read. For example, the children experience eurythmic movement through verses that have been created out of the inherent sounds of the vowel and consonant. Kimball (1972) described a eurythmy lesson for the "s" sound, for which the following verse was created:

"Silversnake. Silversnake
Slide through the slippery Grass."

> The hand describes the "S" several times with a sliding movement through the air and on the floor. For grass the hands go from up to down with a grass-in-the-wind-like shiver. Music supports these gestures, bringing it about that through ear and eye, through touch and motion, child as a whole is reached. (p. 53)

Most of the sounds and letters are learned in this manner.

In the second grade, the eurythmy curriculum continues to connect movement with words, except the forming of the movements is more exact (Van Oordt, 1955-56). Also in the primary grades, children learn geometric patterns and nonmetric forms that correspond to the letters and numbers. They learn to walk and run on straight and curved lines to music in varying rhythms, which later leads them into more complicated forms such as the lemniscate, square, pentagram, and so on.

In the third grade. eurythmic movements become more precise. The content and inner beauty of language and poetry is stressed. Speech and geometry exercises are continued, as alliterative and similar exercises are given to develop a sense of rhythm and a feeling for space. "Eurythmy is employed to correct careless handwriting and to bring the nine-year-old child into a more conscious relationship with his environment" (Heydebrand, 1966, p.25). Through tone eurythmy, the children not only learn musical

scales in an overt expressive manner, but are helped "to pass unscathed through the difficult early years of learning to play a musical instrument" (Compton-Burnett, 1950, p. 11).

While children in the primary grades generally perform eurythmic exercises in a circle as a group, they work more individually in the fourth and fifth grades. Here they move eurythmically into more sophisticated geometric patterns, such as triangles. hexagrams, pentagrams, spirals. and so on. This practice not only provides the foundation for current and future geometry lessons, "but helps to give a clear and conscious relationship to space" (Van Oordt. 1954, p.6). Small eurythmy groups help teach children to form and shape geometric patterns together so as to facilitate space and social awareness. Grammar, which is formally introduced at this age level, is enlivened through eurythmy. The children learn to grasp more consciously the grammatical elements of speech through different eurythmic patterns. Tone eurythmy is the vehicle for studying the major scales and melodies of the classics of Bach, Schumman, Mozart, and Haydn.

In the sixth. seventh, and eighth grades, eurythmic exercises in concentration, speech, Iistening, music, poetry, and geometry are continued. No interpretative eurythmy is encouraged as yet. "As in all other arts, skills precede the possibility of worthwhile creation" (Glas. 1974, p.72).

Eurythmy is carried into the high school, where it is still an integral part of the academic curriculum, particularly in the areas of language, literature, history, and music. At the secondary level, the student's eurythmic skills begin to mature. "They enter more consciously into the inner being of the movements of music and speech" (Heydebrand, 1966, p.30). Students begin to interpret mood, rhythm and stanza forms of the poetic and musical pieces with their feelings. "Eurythmy becomes an illustration and confirmation of what they have learned about the art of poetry and music" (Harwood, 1958, p. 156). Eurythmy then begins to be experienced as a complex discipline in which the body becomes the silent instrument for the visual expression of music, speech, and poetry. Only in the last two years of high school do the fruits of the student's labor begin to widen into real artistic work through such eurythmy performances as Shakespeare, Greek plays, and other classical drama. In addition to its artistic value at the secondary level, "eurythmy and other forms of art balance the strenuous intellectual activity of the last school years..." (Compton-Burnett, 1950, p. 13).

As indicated, eurythmy is a complex, disciplined art of movement, based on the dynamic relationship of gesture to sound. To understand the function and application of eurythmy, one needs

to know Steiner's theory of the forces of human development that undergirds it. Eurythmy is a facilitator and molder of these forces which are the basis of physical, emotional, and cognitive growth, nourishment, speech, etc. Its application is therapeutic, educational, and artistic.

Therapeutic eurythmy helps the entire body to become more plastic and receptive to change and to other therapeutic measures. As Wallace (1971) stated that the human organism of today has lost much of the inner mobility it once had. It has become hardened and stiffened as a result of the pressure and nervous tension of modern life. Regaining some of this mobility facilitates healing processes. In collaboration with physicians and teachers, "significant therapeutic and educational applications of Eurythmy have been developed" (Glas, 1974. p. 68).

Eurythmy in the schools not only contributes to and enlivens the academic experiences in other classes, but helps children to harmonize thought, feeling, and willing through movement. That is, "some exercises are designed to produce a quieting effect on children of excitable natures, others tend to stimulate children inclined to dullness or inactivity" (DeVall, 1940, p. 5). The commonality between therapeutic and educational eurythmy is its artistic nature.

Artistic eurythmy is the basis of therapeutic (curative). educational and tone eurythmy. It makes visible the meter, cadence and rhythm of poetry; the vowels, consonants. and nuances of speech; and the scales. melody, and rhythms of music. The person performing eurythmy "is comparable to a musical conductor in that the eurythmist has to conduct all the motions of his/her body, which work together in their artistic development (and expression) as a soundless orchestra" (Heirman, 1971, p. 15). Eurythmy is a performing art, as are ballet and modern dance. Today there exists a number of professional European and U.S. eurythmy companies, performing internationally, and 50 eurythmy training centers. Eurythmy is being adopted in the workplace--corporations, businesses and industry to enhance team-building, communication and reduce stress. To become a eurythmist requires 4 years of full-time study, plus 2 years curative eurythmy training.

A description of any art has its inadequacies, particularly one of an art based on an unorthodox theory of human development which seems to have some practical, yet esoteric, implications for the fields of medicine, psychology. and education. Perhaps Steiner's eurythmy and its associated theory could best be summed up in the following statement by Franz Hartmann M.D., who wrote in the preface to his biography of Paracelsus (1973):

> If reasonable skeptics say that such things do not exist, they can only mean to say that they do not exist relative to their knowledge, because to deny the possibility of the existence to anything of which we know nothing would imply that we imagined ourselves to be in possession of all the knowledge that exists in the world and believed that nothing could exist of which we do not know. A person who peremptorily denies the existence of anything which is beyond the horizon of his understanding, because he cannot make it harmonize with his accepted opinions, is as credulous as he who believes everything without any discrimination. Neither is he a free thinker (p. v).

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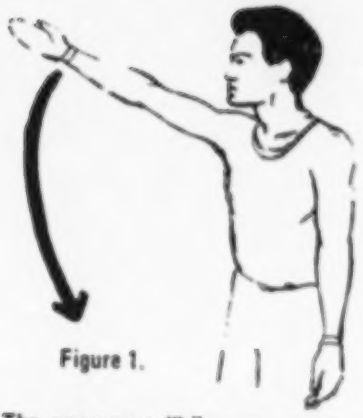

Figure 1.

The consonant "k" movement is a downward, cutting gesture with one or both arms fully extended.

Figure 2.

The consonant "L" movement is a vertical, upward gesture using both arms in unison. The motion is similar to the cascading of a water fountain, beginning at a single source at the base and dispersing at the crest in manifold arcs.

Figure 3.

The consonant "b" movement is an embracing or cradling gesture, similar to cradling a small infant.

Figure 4. The consonant "r" movement is a forward rolling, rotating, or cartwheel motion of 360° with both arms.